

CABINET RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ENTITLED “OUT OF COUNTY PLACEMENTS”

**CHILDREN & FAMILIES (COUNCILLOR GRAHAM HINCHEY)
AGENDA ITEM: 2**

Reason for this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide a Cabinet response to the report published by the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee in May 2018 into ‘Out of County Placements’

Background

2. In September 2017, Children and Young People Scrutiny agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to investigate ‘out of county placements’ of looked after children.
3. The terms of reference of the Task and Finish Group were to:
 - review the current provision, including types, provision, cost and impact on resources;
 - identify gaps in local provision, social services, and impact on education;
 - identify barriers in providing additional support in Cardiff and the impact on children, out of county has.
4. The report of the Task and Finish Group was presented to Scrutiny on 8th May 2018 and Cabinet on 5th July 2018

Issues

5. Applications for care proceedings in England and Wales reached record levels in 2017. This is a major factor contributing to the rise in the number of children looked after (LAC) in the care system, which are now at the highest level since 1985. In Cardiff, LAC numbers have risen from 611 at the end of 2013/14 to 830 at the end of 2017/18, and have continued to increase in the current financial year. The ability, across England and Wales’ to match the needs of children and young people living in the care system, with the right quality and quantum of accommodation, care and support led Sir James Munby, President of the Family Division to state in

2016, “we are facing a crisis and, truth be told, we have no very clear strategy for meeting the crisis. What is to be done?”

6. The work of the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee coincided with a major sector-lead review into the rise in applications for care orders and the number of children in care, the ‘Care Crisis Review’, which was published in July 2018. The ‘Care Crisis Review’ was an intensive piece of work undertaken in 7 months which did not consider the care system as a whole (notably the supply side) but did identify solutions at practice, organisational and system level. At the centre of the Care Crisis Review recommendations is the need for effective strength based practice, with experienced social workers who work with, and alongside families, rather than ‘do to’. The recommendations of the Task and Finish Group in respect of workforce and practice as well as availability and type of placements, align with the evidence in the Care Crisis Review.
7. The recommendations of the Task and Finish Group in relation to placements also align fully with the Capital Ambition commitments to prevent escalation of need and to intervene early. This approach should enable understanding of the root causes of why increasing numbers of children and young people are living in care. The implementation of an integrated system of early help and support and approved by Cabinet in October 2017, is critical to addressing the numbers of children looked after.
8. Whilst the Care Crisis Review did not specifically address the considerable challenges in securing the right placements for children living in the care system, these challenges have been well rehearsed at a national level. In October 2017 the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Cymru, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the National Adoption Service, made a submission to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry looking at public services for care experienced children and young people. The submission stated that:

“The increasing complexity of cases and the growing numbers of children are negatively impacting on both the availability of appropriate placements and the cost of placements. An ageing foster carer population and the increasing cost of providing residential care are draining the sector. Despite the initiatives of the National Fostering Framework, the work of the Welsh Government Residential Task and Finish group , the commitment of local authority placement teams and the work of the Children’s Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) the lack of appropriate placements for looked after children is approaching crisis position”.
9. Whilst there are 19 recommendations from the Task and Finish Group, there are overarching themes of prevention, workforce, practice and commissioning, which are addressed through current Improving Outcomes for Children Work programme or will be developed as new work streams. These overarching themes can be described as follows:

- a) The implementation of a coherent, evidence based model of early help and family support;
- b) securing a competent, confident, supported and empowered workforce, employed on permanent contracts, accountable for their practice, and equipped with the tools to do their jobs;
- c) embedding high standards of social work practice including the full implementation of the Signs of Safety framework;
- d) effective supply of accommodation care and support through the implementation of an enhanced Cardiff in-house fostering service and delivery of a commissioning strategy for residential care which will provide sufficiency of the right types of placement in Cardiff.

Together these themes, and the detailed actions beneath them, provide the right whole system response for the most vulnerable children and families in the City. It is clear they need to be delivered in tandem through a coherent programme, to demonstrably impact on the life chances of children living in care, or at risk of so doing.

10. The response to the Task and Finish Group report, highlights that whilst the direction and intent is clear with regards workforce, social work practice and placement sufficiency, there remain challenges. A refreshed, delivery focussed workforce strategy and Signs of Safety implementation plan will be presented to Cabinet in early 2019 as part of an overarching strategy for Delivering Excellence in Children's Social Services. A new business model for fostering in Cardiff is being developed to the same timescales, and a commission strategy for children's placements by March 2019.

Reason for Recommendations

11. The recommendations of the Task and Finish Group are welcomed and all the recommendations have been accepted or partially accepted. The response attached indicates why some of the very specific recommendations need to be considered more as "in principle" direction due, for example, to the imperative to consider the needs of each child individually in deciding on a suitable placement. The implementation of the committee's recommendations have been aligned with the workstreams being delivered at the core of the Improving Outcomes for Children programme. The recommendations, alongside other analytical work is underway within the directorate, and has helpfully re-emphasised the need to address workforce and practice improvement as well as enhance the supply side issues. Substantial work is already underway to create more placement provision in Cardiff and to address early help and support for families.

Financial Implications

12. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The Council has provided significant levels of additional funding to Children's Services in recent years with a net increase to the budget of £5.8 million (11.86%) in 2018/19. The position in relation to future funding for 2019/20 will be set out in the Council's Budget Report in February 2019.

Legal Implications

13. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report but when looking for appropriate placements, the Local Authority must have regard to any assessed needs. If the case is before the Court the Local Authority must also have regard to what the care plan filed at Court says about the child or young person's placement as the Local Authority will be asking the Court and the parties in the case to approve that plan.

HR Implications

14. There are no direct HR implications for this report specifically. However some of the actions coming from the recommendations may have HR implications and these will be consulted on with trade unions and employees as they arise. Any changes for employees will be managed within corporately agreed policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Cabinet is recommended to agree the response to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee report entitled 'Out of County Placements'

SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	CLAIRE MARCHANT Director of Social Services
	9 November 2018

The following appendix is attached:

Appendix A – Response to recommendations